

# NATIONAL DANGERS,

AND

## MEANS OF ESCAPE.

*by John Hendrick*



THE extraordinary success which attended the American exertions in favor of liberty and independence, with the unparalleled growth and prosperity of the United States, have left perhaps scarcely a doubt on the minds of our citizens, whether the Revolution will or will not be ultimately beneficial to the country. In the blessings which Providence has conferred on this land, all have reason to rejoice. That they may be continued and multiplied, is the ardent desire of the writer of this Article. But he apprehends that there are serious grounds to fear, that our present privileges will be of shorter duration than is generally anticipated, unless the attention of our countrymen can be excited to the dangers which threaten them, and to "the things which belong to their peace." Some facts will therefore be stated, which he regards as a ground of alarm, notwithstanding all the present prosperity of the nation.—Liberty will be taken to express a dissent, on some points, from opinions which are perhaps popular in all countries; but this, it is hoped, will be done in the spirit of candor and not of reproach, and accompanied with such reasonings as may at least evince that the subject deserves a candid and thorough examination. The sources of danger will be comprised in the following particulars.

First. In the Revolutionary war, our countrymen avowedly contended for liberty and the rights of man; yet they held in slavery about half as many human beings as there were of white people in these States, when they were declared free and independent. So huge a mass of oppression, injustice and degradation—exposed as it is to the sunshine of liberty, cannot fail to ferment; and, unless a remedy shall be provided, the fermentation will probably increase till it shall burst all the bands of restraint, and overwhelm the country with distress and horror.

What could have been more shocking to a reflecting mind than to see these States—unmindful of the condition of the blacks, engage a *second time* in war, on account of some violated rights? or to see them sacrifice twenty or thirty thousand of our citizens to revenge alleged wrongs done to some of our seamen, by impressment into a foreign service, while, as a nation, we held in absolute slavery nearly a million and a half of our brethren! A righteous God cannot but abhor such inconsistency in a people who are so ready to fight for liberty; nor will He be deaf to the cries of the oppressed. How many thousands of the poor slaves might have been redeemed, transplanted, and placed in comfortable circumstances, by the hundred and twenty millions of dollars expended in the late war! Would not such an act of justice and mercy have contributed a thousand fold more to the safety and *glory* of the nation, than all our boasted exploits of revenge, depredation and havoc?

In another view of the subject, the direful mass of slavery exposes our country to ruin. The Missouri questions have already agitated the States throughout their whole extent; and in some instances, they have produced such menacing language as ought not to be countenanced in a civilized country. The progress of light respecting the rights of men, will naturally give rise to other questions, which will demand more of the spirit of conciliation and forbearance than has yet appeared in America. It is infinitely important to the welfare of these States, that the principles and spirit of peace should be as thoroughly and extensively cultivated, as the principles and spirit of liberty; for if the latter shall continue to be cultivated, and the former discarded or neglected, the most horrible consequences will naturally result.

A case may be stated, the occurrence of which it is the ardent desire of the writer to prevent: Suppose then, that the Negroes should be kept in ignorance of the Christian principles of love, forbearance and peace, till, by hearing of the glory of fighting for the rights of man, they become intoxicated with the popular sentiment—“*Liberty or Death,*” and resolve, unanimously, “to be free, or perish in the attempt.” How shocking must be the consequences to themselves and to myriads of others! but what man who is friendly to the principles of the American Revolution, could raise the arm of violence to repel the Negro’s claim to the rights of a free citizen?

How very desirable then it must be, that both slave holders and slaves, should have their minds seasonably imbued with sentiments of benevolence and peace, that they may live together in harmony, till the way shall be prepared for the emancipation of the slave, with safety to himself, and to his master!

Second. The host of prejudices, excited by the wars with Britain, greatly endanger the future peace and welfare of the United States. To the prejudices which originated in the Reve-

lutionary contest, we may justly look for one of the principal causes of the more recent war. By the late war, the prejudices were increased; and these expose the parties to future conflicts. This source of danger is augmented by the imprudent policy which is still pursued in both nations. To illustrate this remark a plain case may be stated:—

A long and bloody quarrel had existed between the two powerful families of A and B—in which each suffered great injuries from the other. At length, however, they became weary of the contest—formed a treaty of peace—mutually engaged to refrain from further hostilities, and to treat each other as neighbors and friends. But strong prejudices had been induced by the contest, and their mutual wounds were not soon forgotten. Since their solemn agreement to “bury the hatchet” and to live in peace, the members of each family are often heard reproaching those of the other for past injuries, boasting of their own sanguinary exploits and of the advantages they gained during the conflict. Narratives of what they suffered and what they achieved, are on each side accompanied with bitter sarcasms, adapted to prolong their mutual prejudices, and to transmit them to future generations. These things are done in private circles, at public festivals, in theatrical exhibitions, annual orations, and extensively diffused by newspapers and other periodical publications. In addition to these glaring improprieties each family has been openly, avowedly and unceasingly preparing for another conflict. Such are their jealousies of each other, and such their mode of preserving peace.

Now what shall be said of such a policy between two neighboring families? Is it not manifestly imprudent, antichristian, barbarous,—and in the highest degree reprehensible and dangerous? Would it not be next to impossible for them, while pursuing such a course, to make others believe that they really desire to avoid future wars? Yet such is the policy of Christian nations!—Such the policy of Great Britain, and of the United States! While in words they bless God for peace, and pray for its continuance, they pursue a direct course to defeat their own prayers and to blast their own enjoyments.

Third. The thirst for military and naval fame, in a large portion of our citizens, is another source of danger to our country. Under any form of government this disease is the bane of liberty and public happiness. In a republic, it is peculiarly dangerous. Its direct tendency is, the subversion of republican principles and the destruction of freedom. The more this thirst for sanguinary fame is indulged, the greater is the probability that our country will often engage in needless and ruinous wars,—and that gradual encroachments will be made on the rights of our citizens, till they shall rise against the government, or sink under the hideous weight of a military despotism.

May it not also be truly affirmed, that a thirst for martial renown is not merely dangerous to liberty and peace, but in its very nature,

offensive to God—immoral, inhumane and even murderous? How is this military glory to be achieved but by exciting wars and filling the earth with violence and devastation? Is he not then a murderer at heart, who desires an opportunity to acquire fame by shedding the blood of his brethren? What shall be said of the monster in human form, who is willing that thousands of his brethren should perish, or millions be made miserable, that he may be called a Conqueror or a great General? Is he not an enemy to God, to his country, and to his species? Yet is not this diabolical ambition the very thing which is extolled and adored by thousands in this country, as well as in Europe?—But what better does any people deserve than the curses of war, the chains of despotism, and the vengeance of Heaven, who worship the idol military glory? And is it possible to conceive of a viler passion, either in man or devil, than the *love of war?*

Fourth. The unnatural means which are employed to prevent war and preserve peace, may justly be regarded as a source of danger and ground of alarm. War and peace are as perfectly opposites in nature, as disease and health, or death and life. What then can be more unphilosophical than to suppose, that such opposite effects are to be produced by the same causes or means? Yet is it not a fact, that the *popular means* for preserving peace, are the *natural means* for producing war?

Suppose it to be the real desire of two governments to be frequently at war with each other; what means will they adopt? will they not employ the greater portion of their respective revenues in preparations for war, and little or none in preparations for peace? Will they not in various forms exert their influence to excite and cherish the spirit of war, the love of martial glory, and admiration of military and naval exploits? Surely these are the natural means of war. They are also the very means which Christian nations have adopted as means of peace! As reason and nature teach, that opposite effects will result from opposite causes or means, if the popular means for preserving or producing peace, are adapted to their end, the following prescription will exhibit the genuine means for producing war.

*A Recipe for producing a general war in Christendom.*—Let the several governments display towards each other the spirit of benignity, confidence and friendship—lay aside their expensive preparations for national hostilities, and no more give the world reason to suppose, that they mutually regard each other as unprincipled, public cut-throats and robbers: let much of the revenues of each government be employed in diffusing in every direction the principles of candor, forbearance and amity,—and for bringing into disrepute the spirit, the maxims, the exploits, the apparatus and parade of war and conquest: let orators, historians, poets, painters, and all writers and teachers, combine their influence to expose the injustice, the barbarity and the miseries of war,—and to excite in all men the love of peace: let conquerors, war makers,

and desolaters of countries, be exhibited as the enemies of human happiness, and the reproach of their species ; and let rulers of a pacific character, who shall exert their powers and even hazard their reputation and their lives to prevent war, be regarded as the greatest benefactors of their respective countries and of the world.

Now what will be said of such means for producing war ? Why have they never been adopted by war makers ? Common sense requires no answer to these questions. It is seen at once, that war would never be produced by such means. Yet may it not be boldly affirmed, that these means are as naturally adapted to produce war, as the opposite means are to produce or prolong peace ?

By this fatal misapplication of means, hostilities have been so common, that some have imagined war to be essential to the nature of man. But now it appears, that wars have been rendered necessary, by a mistake as to the proper means for preventing them. Is it then impossible to correct this mistake ? If not, to abolish war is possible.

It will be objected, that many wise and good men have recommended the popular means, as the best means for avoiding war. This is most cheerfully admitted. The writer was himself, for many years, an advocate for such means ; and being conscious of his own sincerity, while of that opinion, and having as full confidence in the sincerity of many others, he has now represented the opinion as a *mistake*, and not a designed imposition. But it should be remembered, that the opinions of the best of men of former ages, have been urged against almost every improvement which has been made in the state of society for a thousand years. How many laws, usages and customs, which were thought just and necessary by our ancestors, have been exploded by the progress of light !

If the preceding remarks should fail of satisfying the reader, his attention is requested to a few plain questions.—Who would think of preserving men from the small pox, by diffusing the contagion and exposing our whole race to its deleterious influence ? What wise parent would train up his children to the love of ardent spirits and the art of gambling, to prevent their becoming intoxicated and cheated in bad company ? Or inspire their minds with exalted ideas of the glory of boxing and duelling, to prevent their perishing in such shameful combats ? But what better or more rational are the popular means for preventing war ? Was there ever a course adopted for a good end, more repugnant to religion, to reason, or to nature, than that of employing the genuine means and spirit of war, as the best and almost the only method of preserving peace ?

It will not, however, be denied that, in some instances, a display of the spirit of war may have been the means of preventing immediate hostilities. Still it may be affirmed, that this spirit has produced *every war* with which the human race has been afflicted ; and that the more this spirit is cherished by any people, the greater is their danger ; and the greater the probability that they will make wanton wars till they shall bring ruin on themselves.

Fifth. The people of the United States are in danger of being ruined by party dissensions. In connexion with the other sources of danger, this deserves the most serious attention.

While the Federal Union comprises upwards of twenty distinct governments, and a large extent of territory ; it also comprises a great variety of discordant opinions, habits and interests. In each of the independent States, the principles and spirit of war are cultivated as the means of safety ; the citizens are armed with weapons of slaughter, and taught to glory in martial exploits. Nor will it be doubted that, in each section of the country, there are men of talents and military ambition, prepared for demagogues in a time of great public excitement. Besides, our history has shown that the people of these States are liable to party passions of the most bewildering character,—passions which call good evil and evil good, and which transform professed friends to avowed enemies. “Who does not recollect,” says the Hon. Judge Story, “the violence with which party spirit in times past raged in this State, breaking asunder the ties of friendship and consanguinity.”\*\* Notwithstanding the more recent calm, unless special care shall prevent, the same spirit may again rise with greater violence, and arm the different sections of the country against each other.

From these facts and circumstances, it is obvious, that the people of these States are very liable to the appalling tempests of civil war. In such an event, our boasted strength, our martial spirit, our hostile preparations—the very means relied on for safety, may all become the means of self-destruction, national ruin, and aggravated misery. Then the indescribable horrors of the French Revolution may be realized in these now happy States ; and, during the tornado, some Cæsar or Napoleon may rise to power, and transform our numerous Republican Institutions, moulding them into one terrific military despotism, and fill this favored land with oppression, conscription, proscription, murder and wretchedness. But, alas ! Shall our countrymen never be convinced, but by fatal experience, that they who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind !

When these several sources of danger shall have been properly considered, the Christian and the Philanthropist will anxiously ask, What course can be adopted to avert the impending evils ? To this question a brief answer will be attempted. In general it may be observed, that a refuge may be found by resorting to the God of peace, the principles of peace, and the spirit of peace. This general remark may comprise the following particulars.

1. Let the white people of the United States display towards the slaves, that benignity and justice which become them as advocates for liberty,—and do all that wisdom and benevolence can do, to ameliorate the condition, improve the character, and effect the emancipation of this injured and degraded race. Let us as a nation no more indulge a thought of another war, to revenge any

\*Late Speech in Massachusetts Convention.

violation of our own rights, till we shall have exemplified a due regard to the rights of the Negroes.

2. Let us do all that can be done to repair the injuries which contempt and avarice have inflicted on the Indian tribes.

3. Let us lay aside our prejudices, our revilings and our boastings, in regard to the people of foreign countries; and cultivate towards all nations and tribes of men, the spirit of philanthropy and friendship; and, as a substitute for the barbarous thirst for military fame, let us seek that glory which results from doing good to all men, and evil to none.

4. Let party passions no more have an ascendancy in the public councils of our nation, nor in the breasts of our citizens. Let the spirit of forbearance, harmony and good will, be cultivated between the different sections of our country—between rulers and subjects, and among all classes of citizens in the several States. Let our motto continue to be,—“*United we stand, divided we fall.*”

5. Should it be manifest, on examination, that the proposed “Recipe for producing a general war in Christendom,” is not adapted to this end; let due exertions be made to apply its principles for the production and preservation of universal peace. Let us no longer rely on the haughty, irritable, irritating, and revengeful war spirit, as the best means of preserving peace and preventing war. The precious *figs* of peace are not the natural fruit of this noxious *thistle*. If we would long enjoy the blessing of peace, we must sow its seeds and cherish its plants. Let our children, then, be educated to the love of peace and an abhorrence of war. Let such men of talents be raised to power as shall be distinguished for pacific dispositions and a due command of their own passions—men who will not sacrifice the peace of their country to the idol of a party, to the lust of power, of wealth or of fame—nor to the passion of revenge.

In a word, let the means which are best adapted to preserve peace among neighboring families, be extended for the prevention of war between neighboring States and nations. Then the several sources of danger will be continually diminishing; and in pursuing such a policy, the people of every land may safely confide in the ALMIGHTY, as the God of peace, and the God of their salvation.

It is not, however, supposed, that such changes and improvements, as have now been proposed, can be otherwise than gradually introduced; yet, by proper exertions, much may be annually done to diminish the sources of national dangers, and to place these States on the ground of permanent peace.